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Democracy Without Citizens

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- deepening intra-South networking

- contributing a South perspective towards the transformation of the Social Sciences on a global scale

- producing alternative theoretical and methodological approaches of knowledge building

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This paper aims at discussing the opportunities and the threats that democratic regimes face today in southern countries. More than twenty years ago, Bobbio warned of the risks incurred by a democracy in the absence of an active, critical, and well-organized citizenry that continually puts pressure on its country's rulers and the leaders of its political parties, since "when politics are sequestered by just a few citizens, the richest and the powerful, in order to satisfy their interests and perpetuate their mandate, the citizenry loses interest in politics" (Bobbio 1986:25). In such cases, even when they exist in a formal sense, democratic institutions are bereft of all content.

The political culture of the twenty-first century has been characterized by the apathy of citizens and the discrediting of both political parties and their leaders, as well as a lack of interest in public matters. This is especially true of the younger generation. Furthermore, the hazards impinging upon the consolidation of democracy are more severe in countries where social differences and poverty have increased considerably because the governments are in a less favorable position to make decisions regarding their resources.

Twenty years ago, of the 18 countries included in the UNDP report (2004) entitled *Democracy in Latin America: Towards a Citizens' Democracy*, only Colombia, Costa Rica, and Venezuela were considered to be "democracies." In contrast, at present we can observe a panorama of relative peace from the Rio Grande to Patagonia and authoritarian governments have given way to more or less democratic systems (which at least can be considered as electoral democracies).

Yet after nearly two decades of democratizing experiences, many citizens of Latin American and Caribbean countries are dissatisfied with their governments' performance because, for the most part, they feel that these governments born of democratic processes have a poor track record in terms of well-being and economic prosperity.

In this subcontinent, regardless of their democratic consolidation degree, all countries to some extent have had to endure the negative effects produced by economic policies dictated from abroad by international financial agencies. These economic measures, known as the Washington Consensus, have led to the deterioration of wages; growing unemployment; the abandonment of agriculture; a decrease in welfare policies in the areas of health,



education, and housing; and, in general they have produced, unequal income distribution.

Aside from the problems affecting consolidation, the “new democracies” in Latin America have been confronting problems similar to those faced by “consolidated democracies,” which we could also term “worn-out democracies.” In Western European and North American countries, the loss of confidence in politics, parties and, above all, “political leaders” has been expressed through growing indifference and the withdrawal of citizens towards their “private” lives. Several authors have ascribed this disparagement of politics in the twenty-first century to the effects of globalization because it has produced cultural changes at two levels: a) in the intensity of communications, which leads to a destructuring of social and political identities; and b) due to the ability to mobilize resources and information instantly throughout the world, which leads to a real dissolution of the borders of national states. The breakdown of the State as a territory within which power is wielded is directly responsible for the discrediting of “politics” at the national level and of its institutional actors (political parties and rulers) because the population realizes that, in the final analysis, “they are not making the decisions.”

In this context, I focus on the political party systems of several countries in their classic definition (institutions, political parties, electoral rules), because they provide the framework for power competition, but I intend to go further and aim at the evaluation of the “quality” of democracy. The comparison of the party system should consider the most recent changes that have taken place in recent years through electoral processes, where there has been a reorientation of political trends with the arrival of leftist candidates, as well as countries, like México where elections produced the change of political party in power but preserving a basic loyalty to neo-liberal politics.

But, unlike some other preceding comparative projects, here I will be interested in considering some of the problems that democracy faces in the twenty first century, such as I will argue in the following pages.



GROWTH WITHOUT WELL-BEING


In the 1990s, a reasonable degree of stability was also attained, and economic dynamism recovered. Nevertheless, there has been a major contradiction between these positive signs in politics and the economy, on the one hand, and the deterioration of the population's living standards, on the other. As regards most of the population, the increase achieved in productivity in the past fifteen years and the relative economic stability attained have not led to well-being for its members.

Although after the "lost decade" many countries have recovered a certain pace in their economic growth, a large majority of Latin Americans have not enjoyed the benefits they expected from governments arising from free, competitive electoral processes. The aforementioned UNDP report clearly reflected that attitude of disappointment and rejection among the citizenry: while 44.9% of Latin Americans would support an authoritarian government if it could solve their country's economic woes, 41.9% would also accept paying the price of some amount of corruption to ensure a better situation. In addition, during the past two decades, poverty has not been cut back significantly, and continues to plague 225 million people, i.e., 43.9% of the population (UNDP 2004:39).

In short, throughout the last twenty years economic growth has been achieved within the framework of inclusion in the world market, but income distribution has become worse, poverty has been increasing, and the sources of productive employment have been dismantled. On the whole, Latin American countries do not have the worst poverty levels in the world, but they *do* evidence the greatest inequality among the members of their societies.

FACTORS THAT WEAKEN BOTH THE NEW AND OLD DEMOCRACIES


Latin American democracies have evolved in countries often fragmented by a colonial legacy that left its mark with Indians and colonizers, slaves imported from other continents, immigrants, and Creole landowners. This legacy resulted in societies whose different cultures were poorly integrated into the national context or which exhibited profound structural contradictions still unresolved in the process of forming modern national states. I mention this cultural legacy because I feel that it would be very important to discuss this



issue in a seminar that includes the experiences of countries of the South on other continents. For the consolidation of a democratic regime, a common cultural ground for the interaction of political actors is very important.

Drawing on the report *Democracy in Latin America: Towards a Citizens' Democracy* published by the UNDP in 2004, we can cite eight factors that weaken emergent democracies in Latin America:

1. There is a dearth of social citizenship. Thus, nearly all the countries in the region are plagued by greater inequality in income and wealth distribution than the world average. More than 25% of the citizens in 15 Latin American nations live under the poverty line; in seven, the proportion of the poor is over 50% of the population. There are 209 million people whose income is under the poverty line. Therefore, the status of well-being there is very fragile, as is reflected by the fact that seven out of every new jobs created in the region since 1990 are in the informal economy, whereas only six of every 10 new jobs created, covered by some kind of social protection.
2. There is also a lack of civil citizenship. In other words, despite the progress made, the following rights have not been fully implemented: the right to individual liberty; freedom of expression, thought, and religion; the right to property and to enter into valid, legally secure contracts, etc. Citizens perceive that there are serious shortcomings in the way that justice is administered. According to a survey conducted by the UNDP, the majority feel that there is still a long way to go to attain reasonable conditions of equality before the law (the rich always or nearly always manage to assert their rights, while the poor, immigrant or indigenous segments of the population are at a serious legal disadvantage).
3. In many countries we find a deficit in terms of political citizenship. Half of the population prefers economic development to democracy. These “non-democrats” comprise 26.5% of the population, whereas those in doubt (i.e., people who agree with the concept of democracy but think it is valid for the government to make anti-democratic decisions when conducting its business) account for 30.5%. That is to say, over half of all citizens are not committed to the true realization of a democratic system.
4. Neo-liberal economic reforms have not met with people's expectations. In the 1990s, a promise for development was devised




in the form of a neo-liberal economic model (the above-mentioned Washington Consensus), from which the majority of the population is nowadays excluded. That model recommended budgetary discipline, financial and commercial liberalization, privatizations, changes in public spending priorities... in short, a deregulation framework which at best places the State in a position as a referee between the different interest groups. Stronger links to the market have borne fruit at the macroeconomic level, but their effects have not reached many citizens: they did not lead to an appreciable reduction in poverty levels; they in fact increased inequalities and projected wide percentages of the population into the informal economy due to a lack of jobs.

5. A weakening of the State has occurred. States have lost their ability to influence, control, regulate or benefit from transnational processes, or to withstand hegemonic tendencies in economic or political plans being prepared in the centers of financial power. In most of Latin America, the State evidences grave deficiencies vis-à-vis the interests of local or international “factic” powers.

6. New factic powers are emerging and we find a proliferation of interest groups (especially related to business) acting as powerful lobbies that distort forms of genuine democratic representation. And the mass media, which are part of business groups not subordinated to political powers, with highly diversified economic interests, act as “superpowers” limiting the sovereignty of public institutions.

7. Corruption is an endemic evil undermining the rule of law in almost all the countries of the region. The nonchalant attitude taken towards corruption is like affects a very significant portion of society: 44.1% of the citizens surveyed accept paying the price of some degree of corruption in order to expedite bureaucratic procedures or cut through red tape. Dirty or black money has devastating effects on some of these countries’ institutions and political leaders.

8. Moreover, the State has literally lost “pieces of its territory” which have been occupied by people conducting economic activities that are not only informal, but illegal. In many countries, drug trafficking controls significant amounts of resources as well as entire regions, where it wields a level of power similar to that of the State. The extension of drug trafficking implies a dual challenge: on the one hand, it attempts to control part of state



apparatuses and territories; on the other, it attracts the attention of the U.S., generating new forms of external pressure.


CHALLENGES FOR CONSOLIDATING DEMOCRACY

Latin American democracies are facing the challenges of consolidation and legitimation. That is why we should examine how well the social actors involved in political processes in each country have managed to realize their aspirations. We should also delve into the “sustainability of democracy,” i.e., its ability to last as a political system without a violent breakdown of its institutions, but also without becoming stagnated. We need only recall the case of Venezuela, where the deterioration of a party system that was formally democratic but that did not represent the majority of the population led to its virtual disappearance of traditional political parties, shortly before Hugo Chávez entered office.

To achieve true consolidation of democracy, the State must be able to change, to perfect itself on the basis of citizens’ participation; thus, both its political power and institutions may acquire legitimacy. There is a kind of tension between the market economy and a democratic political system (Offe 1992, Maravall 1995, Przeworski 1995). In this sense, we encounter great contrasts in the opinions and historical experiences of different Latin American countries regarding the likelihood that a democratic regime may establish an efficient market economy and, at the same time, create a more equitable and just economic system.

On the other hand, tensions are derived from the legal structure, based on the right to private property because large companies are uneasy with democratic theory and visions (Gianfranco Pasquino 2000:17-18). Lastly, the experiences of many nations currently show that the relationship between democracy and the free market is not as linear and harmonious as some authors in the late twentieth century came to believe.

The electoral rules we know today are a victory of the masses that burst into political life in the twentieth century for the purpose of ensuring the realization of their rights. Political democracy was a gradual conquest of masses against authoritarian regimes; however, today, in the twenty-first century, we are becoming aware of the limitations of political democracy due to the discrediting of political parties, the use of marketing as a method for winning voters’ sympathies or because politicians -who were elected by the people-



actually lack the ability to make many of the decisions affecting voters since such decisions are undertaken in international financial centers.


Despite all democracy currently offers better possibilities for developing citizenship in the myriad dimensions with which it has been conceived than other known types of political systems. From this conviction comes an interest in knowing more about other countries' experiences when consolidating democracy and quality of democracy, and also in comparing the opportunities that can arise for different countries in regard to forms of representation, which entails restructuring political institutions and political parties, but above all discovering incentives for setting off polemic collective action that calls for reformulating political power structures and new ways of participating (which some authors have termed "radical democracy" (Mouffe 1992).

In the present context, one of globalization's effects has been a loss of decision-making capabilities on the part of the national state. This may explain, albeit only partially, why the hopes generated by the third democratic wave in the 1980s has not given way to advances in civil and social rights in keeping with the expectations that had been created, and why the right to elect one's rulers often did not translate into greater freedom, justice, and progress.

Nevertheless, the dilemmas now faced by democracies in Latin America should not make us lose our perspective. A poor democracy is better than a poor dictatorship. In this sense, Dasgupta (1993) clarified that democracy and freedom are as precious -in and of themselves- for the poor as they are for the rich. Thus, the issue to be analyzed here is whether that freedom impinges upon other aspects of material well-being.

A study conducted on democracy, development, and well-being in 140 countries (Przeworski, Álvarez, Cheibub, and Limongi 2000) revealed that the correlation between development and democracy is strong but not definitive. Other historical factors come into play, such as a country's political and cultural heritage (ethnic and religious heterogeneity), its institutional framework (presidentialism vs. parliamentarianism), and the world political climate, whose influence upon political change has not been adequately documented.

Once a country achieves a level of development of 2 500 to 3 000




U.S. dollars per capita –such as Portugal, Mexico, Algeria or Costa Rica–, democracy makes a difference, not so much because a democratic setting guarantees a higher degree of development but because of the type of development achieved. In democratic countries, income distribution is more equitable and wages are higher (Przeworski, Álvarez, Cheibub, and Limongi 2000:164). Dictatorships grow on the basis of greater capital investment and lower wages: since they can repress the workers, they can pay labor poorly and use it in a rather inefficient manner. Even though there may not be major differences between a dictatorship and a democracy in their general level of development, democracy *does* make a difference in the specific characteristics assumed by the development process: for example, employment, social policies, productive investment, etc. (Przeworski, Álvarez, Cheibub, and Limongi 2000:168).

THE LATIN AMERICAN LEFT AND THE SEARCH FOR ALTERNATIVES

It is also possible that, on this region's political scene, the failure of the Washington Consensus has prompted a significant shift towards the left. Municipal, legislative or presidential elections held in Venezuela (Hugo Chávez), Brazil (Lula da Silva), Chile (Ricardo Lagos), the Dominican Republic (Lionel Fernández), Panama (Martín Torrijos), Uruguay (Tabaré Vázquez), and Bolivia (Evo Morales) have evidenced this overall trend towards the left.

A little more than two years ago in the Argentine capital, Kirchner and Lula, presidents of Argentina and Brazil, respectively, signed what has been called the Buenos Aires Consensus. In essence, that document was intended to address citizens' well-being and the redistribution of income and wealth as priority goals for their countries' economic policies, without sacrificing basic macroeconomic stability. In a parallel fashion, this policy has been implemented in Chile by the Gobierno de la Concertación and by Ricardo Lagos. With its name, the Buenos Aires Consensus offered a kind of alternative to the Washington Consensus, and could be deemed a social democratic version of the latter, but unfortunately, all too soon it drifted into clandestinity.

It is interesting to compare the effect of democratization in the experiences of Mexico and Portugal during the 1980s, when both nations had similar levels of income per capita. Whereas in Portugal



one could observe a strategy more concerned with the well-being of the entire population, in Mexico inequalities were heightened in that same period.


On October 7 and 8, 2005, over 30 Ibero-American economists met in the city of Salamanca to analyze the Barcelona Development Agenda more closely and proposed the drafting of national agendas based on consensuses; the reduction of inequalities in the region and the promotion of opportunities for all; greater investment in human development; and a suitable framework for regulating international migration. In addition, they advocated more markets, a higher degree of competition, and better states; a greater opening up, innovation, and integration at the regional level; and greater flexibility in exchange rates. They also stressed the need for financial de-dollarization, promoting bank usage and creating capital markets in domestic currency. Lastly, they recommended redesigning the international financial architecture, placing emphasis on a modification of the role of the International Monetary Fund.

GLOBALIZATION: AN OPPORTUNITY OR THREAT FOR A DEVELOPMENTAL STATE?

Globalization is a complicated, multifaceted phenomenon, but at the same time it has become a sort of “fetish word.” Here I am referring to concepts that are used to define scenarios, as excuses to justify actions, denounce unjust situations, to support particular policies or simply to express disconcertedness in the face of the intricacies of a given historical period. The term “globalization” began to be used in the 1960s as a prism reflecting the complexity and interdependence of the world capitalist system.

Globalization as we have experienced it since around 1970 involves a process of instantaneous communications (impossible to control within the “national space” under the administration of the State), which has occurred thanks to satellite technology.

Cultural processes that have been unleashed should be viewed from an anthropological perspective. These processes go far beyond neo-liberalism, even though at this stage big capital and above all financial actors have been taking the greatest advantage of this situation, and also, at least in theory, they have been the most




well-prepared for comprehending it. The biggest sin of the left has been a failure to do some very serious thinking about these changes and their impact on economic development models and especially on political action. For that reason, not only socialist or planned economies have undergone a crisis, but also social - democratic economies which were so successful in the late twentieth century because they facilitated the development of mechanisms for negotiation and counterweights among the interests of opposing political actors such as businessmen and unions, in a national context.

Thus, globalization has modified the fundamental concepts upon which the construction of traditional nation-states was grounded: power, sovereignty, territory, and self-determination are all concepts that will have to be redefined in the era of global capitalism. We should also consider the transformation of citizens' lives, changes in the family, and modifications of gender roles and, in general, in lifestyles. Therefore, globalization reflects the "expanding scale, growing magnitude, speeding up, and deepening impact of transcontinental flows and patterns of social interaction" (Held and McGrew 2003:13). New political actors emerge from this cultural changes and old actors in new environment that offers different opportunities.

Since the dimensions of countries' political arena came to be modified, the concept of what is "national" took on new meanings, while political actors lost certain resources and gained others. I maintain the hypothesis that traditional actors on the left -such as unions, parties, and the State itself- lost resources and strength, while others -such as the media or financial capital- became very powerful. That is why the left needs a different strategy to successfully insert itself in this new national space -so intensely linked to international affairs- the political agendas and demands of society's marginalized sectors.

Moreover, within nation-states, globalization has spurred a process of decentralization, regionalization, and a reassessment of subnational political units. As early as 1996, a document published by the OECD with the title *Globalisation: What Challenges and Opportunities for Governments?* outlined the dual direction to be taken by this change for governments and public administrations. On the one hand, it posed the need for adjusting governments' structures, making it feasible for them to govern in an increasingly interdependent world and, on the other, it emphasized the



necessity for a thorough analysis of the impacts of globalization on national and international policies, as well as on the restructuring of relations among the different actors participating in the process of designing public policies, stressing -and I think this is good news- that the final goal is none other than to protect and strengthen democracy. Differentiated political regions call for a new geographical analytical perspective, not to override regional differences with the national average.

In the consolidation process, issues concerned with the results that democratic governments offer their citizens become even more relevant; examples of these are security, the administration of justice and social and economic policies, the goal seems to be to create employment and ensure well-being. The poor performance and outcomes of “democratic” Latin American governments represent an obstacle for the consolidation of democracy because the population is disappointed by the meager results of the turnover of political power.


QUESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

The discussion above lays the foundation for further enquiry. It would be most useful to combine a very traditional political party system analysis with the study of new factors that “weaken democracies” today in order to enquire into how tensions are resolved between the demands posed by dispossessed segments of the population in democratic societies and the options for determining social policies in the contemporary world, so dominated by globalization. Questions that arise are: How can the exigencies of neo-liberal structural reforms be reconciled with the public demands voiced freely by political actors in democratic systems? How has the party system changed in recent years?

Besides the study of party systems, it is pertinent to pay special attention to:

-The new and old factic powers in their interaction with political institutions and political parties, in particular,

- The mass media and its highly diversified economic interests.
- The corruption that is penetrating public institutions.

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- The dirty money with its devastating effects on institutions and political leaders.
 - The drug trafficking and national security.

The countries amenable to such study are those where a recent election produced a party turn over or at least an important shift in political orientation, to be compared with those countries with a long period of stability and consolidated political system, in risk of becoming "to consolidated".



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